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ABSTRACT

Teachers must make sure that the right book gets to the right child at the right time in order to develop positive reading habits. However, once a book is selected, students should be encouraged to think about what they are reading and use the story to evaluate and enrich their personal knowledge. Two classroom programs that use the whole language approach to reading are (1) an individualized and/or group reading and response program and (2) journal writing as a response to literature. For students who work well independently, the first program uses varied project ideas that do not represent the easiest option--such as preparing a television commercial to try to get others to buy the book, writing a letter to a character in the book, designing a book jacket, finding and playing music to accompany a scene from the book, or making a time line with illustrations of events. In the second program, the students keep a structured journal as they read a novel. In the journal, the students should be encouraged to detail their personal responses, research topics introduced in the novel, describe themes and characters, include creative writing of their own, and write a letter to the book's author. Writing and having someone read and respond can generate an English program that achieves cognitive and affective results. (Appendixes include an extensive bibliography of Canadian children's literature, a reading record, a list of projects, and suggested readings on the whole language approach. Seven references are also included.) (NKA)

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Contemporary Canadian Children's Literature for the Intermediate Grades: A Whole Language Approach

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Contemporary Canadian Children's Literature for the Intermediate Grades: A Whole Language Approach

Traditionally, a single novel was introduced to the whole class and the work began. Either the teacher read aloud or students read silently or aloud one chapter at a time. Each chapter would be followed by a large number of questions, supposedly to test story comprehension. All the children were expected to read all the chapters and to answer all the questions in sequential order. In fact only some actually read the story while others simply skimmed along more or less reading, more or less understanding. The approaches suggested in this paper derive from the view that the response to the story is best when it comes from the reader rather from the teacher's set of questions. There may be concern that the novel will not be carefully read without the threat of questions on each chapter. But it has been shown time and time again that comprehension will most likely be sharper and richer when the reader is invited to choose a personal response. I want therefore to present some effective methods for the discussion, sharpening and enrichment of reader's responses .

Before, however, these approaches to the use of novels in the intermediate grades are examined I would like to introduce a few techniques for helping students find easy and interesting books. It is important, if developing a reading habit is your goal, to make sure that the right book gets to the right child at the right time. Smith (1983) strongly makes the point that if we are serious about

teaching reading then we must make the experience of learning to read easy and interesting, a task not always quite as simple as it appears (Halpern, 1981).

Three ways of introducing easy and interesting books:

1. The Greasy Finger (Five Finger) Test

After a student has selected a novel, suggest they try this simple readability trick. "Start reading the first page of the book, putting a finger down on each word that you can't read. If at the end of the first page all five fingers are down on the page, the book is probably too difficult to read." However, if the student really wants to read that particular book for some motive known only to him/her self, then certainly encourage him/her to do so.

2. "Five minute only" booktalks to be given by teacher or librarian.

The emphasis here is on brevity. The purpose of these booktalks is to introduce as many books as possible in a very short time. Choose the books from Appendix A and you will find something for everyone. Read a couple of paragraphs from the first few pages and then maybe a paragraph or two from the middle of the book. This technique is only as good as the book-talk performer, so please read the book in advance. For reasons of fluency it is suggested that book-talks be done by librarians and/or teachers, not by students.

3. Daily oral reading by the teacher.

Choose one of the suggested novels in Appendix A (you can't miss). Every day read a chapter or a good portion of a chapter to your class. This is a tried and true method for introducing good books to everyone (Fisher and Elleman, 1984)

We've been talking about children finding the right books, but of course the right books have to be available. How do they get within the children's reach? First of all a teacher has to be given responsibility for the buying of books. But, administering the book budget for junior grades can be a mixed blessing. There is no doubt that books are good for schools and yet teachers frequently avoid the task of choosing books because there are so many to catch our interests and stretch our budgets. Where do we start reading and buying? What books do students like? Which books are at the right reading level? These are the questions most often voiced during workshops and presentations on literature for young people. Appendix A, a bibliography of high quality Canadian contemporary junior novels, is a serious attempt to answer these queries. Each of these books could be read by the whole class, or by small interest groups or by individuals for recreation and/or independent novel study. However, some of the titles are best suited for eleven year olds and some would be most appreciated by fourteen year olds. Decisions concerning the appropriateness of the best book(s) for your population can only be made after the book has been read in its entirety. The maturity and the reading tastes of your students should be major considerations for determining your choices.

For this age group, the process of choosing a good book from your collection should be considered at least as valuable as the evaluation of comprehension through testing and/or questioning. The three methods suggested to students earlier in this paper help narrow your selection to that one "must read" choice.

Whatever the book choice, students should be encouraged to be active readers at all times. An active reader thinks about what s/he

is reading and uses the story to evaluate as well as enrich personal knowledge. Two programs for helping to develop active readers will be presented. These classroom techniques for teaching novels in the intermediate grades are based on the principles of a Whole Language Approach to the Language Arts. Because this paper is one that discusses books and their classroom use, the full explanation of Whole Language in the Language Arts will be left for others (see Appendix D for suggestions for further reading). For this paper however, the working definition for Whole Language is the skill of comprehending and communicating in reading, writing, listening and speaking. Comprehension, interest, effort and success are all interrelated. If the book is not of interest or within the child's literary or personal experience background, then it is highly doubtful that language or literary growth will occur.

I. *An individualized and/or group reading and response program*

The first classroom program to be discussed is a free reading or individualized program. This program, contrary to the implications of its name, works best with a great deal of organization. The Reading Record as presented in Appendix B is a necessary structure for the successful implementation of this program. Students unable to keep good records, or unable to work independently, should be discouraged from this course of studies and should be directed to a more teacher-directed format.

Appendix C, a list of categories of projects, goes hand in hand with Appendix B. Upon finishing a novel, the student is directed to complete Appendix B and embark on a project from one section of Appendix C. Suggestions for Appendix C are many and may be as varied

as the imagination and creativity and talents of the student. However, to give teachers and students a starting point, here are some ideas for the project section. It is a good idea to have students vary their choices so that their projects reflect the book rather than simply the easiest options.

PROJECTS

1. *Oral*

Prepare and present a T.V. commercial to try to get others to buy your book.

Meet in groups of 3 or 5 to tell others about your book.

Read an exciting part to the class (after first preparing through rehearsing).

2. *Drama*

Prepare a Reader's Theatre (Larson, 1976) of one chapter or section.

Tape-record a skit based on the book. You may have to make your voice sound like different characters.

Put on a doll play or a puppet play about one part of the book.

3. *Written*

Write a letter to a character in the book describing differences and similarities in your lives.

Write an advertisement about the book.

Describe how you would have solved a problem differently than a character in the book did.

4. *Arts and Crafts*

Design a book jacket.

Make a time line with illustrations of events.

Make a comic strip of one of the scenes.

5. *Music*

Find and play music to accompany a scene that you read aloud.

Write a song to describe part of the action

6. *Demonstrations*

Show the class how you learned to make something from reading the book.

Demonstrate a scientific principle you learned from the book.

Present a raised map of the place where the story takes place.

II. *Journal Writing As A Response To Literature*

In this program the students keep a structured journal (Blatt and Rosen, 1984, Santa, Dailey and Nelson, 1985) as they read an individual or shared novel. A variety of writing responses is suggested to the students, who understand that a writing session will follow each reading session. Initially, some students may balk at the prospect of 'so much writing'. At this stage the teacher has to deliver the very important message that the reader's active response helps reading comprehension and that there are a wide range of possible writing responses--something for everyone. Some of the possibilities for responding to the reading are:

1. Personal responses:

a) Characters or events that I feel attracted to or repulsed by.

b) Something that I read that made me feel angry.

c) Something that I read that I did not understand.

d) A situation or a place that is familiar to me.

e) Something that happened in the bopk that I didn't understand.

f) An educated guess as to what might happen next.

2. A letter to the author giving praise and/or suggestions for

improvement.

3. Research into a topic introduced in my book.

4. Some shared writing (writing with a partner) to go along with a book that you both read (e.g. an imaginary dialogue between characters).

5. Some private writing for my eyes only.

6. Descriptions of themes, characters, tone, mood or moral message.

7. Personal opinion of characters, situations, setting.

8. Imaginary or alternative directions for story.

Note that sometimes writing responses can be either collaborative (4), or personal (1b, 1d); also, they can be conjectural or imaginary (3, 8) as well as descriptive (6) or critical (7). Not to be overlooked or forgotten is the importance of responding to the student's journal responses (Gambrell, 1985). It is a good idea to suggest that students include direct questions for the teacher to answer, or comments for the teacher to respond to. Writing only to yourself has limited appeal, yet writing and having someone read and respond (personally, not critically) can make the difference between just another English program and a program that achieves results, cognitively and affectively.

APPENDIX A

BIBLIOGRAPHY OF CANADIAN CHILDREN'S LITERATURE FOR THE INTERMEDIATE GRADES

GENERAL FICTION

Butchart, Jaylene. *Journey Through a Shadow*. Seal Books, 1983.

Craddock, Sonia. *The T.V. War and Me*. Scholastic, 1981.

Craddock, Sonia. *The Treasure Hunt*. Gage, 1984.

Craddock, Sonia. *The Trouble With Mitch*. Scholastic, 1986.

Doyle, Brian. *Hey,Dad!* Groundwood, 1978.

Doyle, Brian. *You Can Pick Me Up At Peggy's Cove*. Groundwood, 1979.

Doyle, Brian. *Up To Low*. Groundwood, 1982.

Duncan, Frances. *The Toothpaste Genie*. Scholastic-TAB, 1981.

Engel, Marian. *My Name Is Not Odessa Yarker*. Kids Can Press, 1977.

Howarth, Mary. *Could Dracula Live In Woodford?* Kids Can Press, 1983.

Hughes, Monica. *Beckoning Lights*. 1982.

Little, Jean. *Mama's Going To Buy You A Mockingbird*. Puffin, 1984.

Waterton, Betty. *Quincy Rumple*. Groundwood, 1984.

Wilson, Eric. *The Ghost Of Lunenburg Manor*. Totem Books, 1983.

MULTICULTURAL FICTION

Hughes, Monica. *My Name Is Paula Popowich!*. James Lorimer, 1983.

Montero, Gloria. *The Summer The Whales Sang*. James Lorimer, 1985.

Reid, Malcolm. *Salut,Gadot!* James Lorimer, 1982.

Smucker, Barbara. *Amish Adventure*. Clarke Irwin, 1983.

Smucker, Barbara. *White Mist*. Clarke Irwin, 1985.

Yerou, Aristides and Barry Dickson. *The Friendship Solution and My Father's Ghost*. James Lorimer, 1984.

SURVIVAL

Hudson, Jan. *Sweetgrass*. Tree Frog Press, 1984.

Truss, Jan. *Jasmin*. Atheneum, 1982.

HISTORICAL FICTION

Clark, Joan. *The Hand Of Robin Squires*. Clarke Irwin, 1981.

Duncan, Frances. *Cariboo Runaway*. Burns & MacEachern, 1976.

Freeman, Bill. *Trouble At Lachine Mill*. James Lorimer, 1983.

Paperny, Myra. *The Wooden People*. Little Brown, 1976.

APPENDIX B

READING RECORD (with examples)

AUTHOR	*TITLE*	*PAGES READ*	*PROJECT*	*RATING*
Cleary	*Ramona the Brave*	all	story-line map	*****
Cleary	*Mitch and Amy*	all	differences of twins	***
Taylor	*All of a Kind Family*	all	poem about sisters	****

APPENDIX C

PROJECTS

1. Oral
2. Drama
3. Written
4. Arts and Crafts
5. Music
6. Demonstration

APPENDIX D

SUGGESTED READINGS ON WHOLE LANGUAGE APPROACH

Hansen,H., Newkirk,T., & Graves,D. (ed.), (1985). *Breaking Ground: Teachers Relate Reading and Writing*. New Hampshire: Heinemann Educational Books.

Mickelson,N. (1987) *Evaluation in Whole Language*. Faculty of Education, University of Victoria, Victoria, British Columbia.

Newman, J. (ed.), (1985). *Whole Language Theory in Use*. New Hampshire: Heinemann Educational Books.

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Blatt, G. & Rosen, L. M. (1984). The writing response to literature. *Journal of Reading*, 28, 8-12.

Fisher, C.J. & Elleman, B.(1984). The read-aloud remedy. *Instructor and Teacher*, 93, 66-68.

Gambrell, L.B.(1985). Dialogue journals: Reading-writing interaction. *The Reading Teacher*, 38, 512-516.

Halpern, H. (1981). An attitude survey of uninterrupted sustained silent reading. *Reading Horizons*, 21, 272-280.

Larson, M. (1976). Reader's theatre: New vitality for oral reading. *The Reading Teacher*, 29, 359-360.

Santa, C. M., Dailey, S.C. & Nelson, M. (1985). Free-response and opinion proof: A reading and writing strategy for middle grade and secondary teachers. *Journal of Reading*, 28, 346-352.

Smith, F.(1983). *Essays Into Literacy*. London:Heinemann.